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Movements of Troops in Cities

IN CASES OF

RIOT OR INSURRECTION,

BY RUSSELL THAYER.

(Read before the American Philosophical Society, Dec. 20th, 1878.)

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It is indeed fortunate that the cases are few which demand the intervention of armed troops for the suppression of lawless mobs intent upon acts of violence. It is nevertheless true that at rare intervals the employment of the military force becomes necessary for the preservation of public order and security. Such occasions have arisen in the recent past, and may occur in the future.

It will be understood in the treatment of this subject that the troops referred to are militia, although in general the rules to be observed are, of course, the same whether regulars or militia are employed. The general reader will also understand that, the subject being treated from a military point of view, the serious questions of law and fact which precede the calling out of troops for the suppression of violence are not considered. The case supposed is simply as follows, viz.: an armed and turbulent mob exists in a large city, the civil authorities are powerless to suppress violence. As a last resort the military force has been duly and properly called upon, and lawfully empowered to act.

Now, two cases may occur. The mob may exist in the city in which the troops already are; or the troops may be called upon to go to a remote point to enforce the laws and restore order. These cases will be considered separately.

Case I. A large city is in a state of tumult. An armed mob exists. The civil authorities have endeavored to suppress the disturbance, and are powerless to do so. The military are called upon. What are the proper precautions to be taken, and the proper movements to be made?

It will be presumed that there is in the city one brigade, consisting of three regiments of infantry, a troop of cavalry, and a battery of artillery.

The commands are promptly assembled at their respective armories fully armed and equipped. A proper supply of ammunition is issued to each command. At the several armories the following dispositions will be made. A strong, armed guard should immediately be placed at the doors

and in front of the building. If a mob collects outside, and threatens to force its way in, the doors and windows should be barricaded with anything that may be at hand (chairs, tables, benches, etc., will serve for this purpose), and a proper force is to be placed at each opening to repel any attack that may be made. It will, however, in most cases be unnecessary to make such dispositions as these, as in circumstances of this kind the mob is generally occupied at some remote point. It should also be here remarked that it adds much to the *esprit de corps* of the soldiers, and also materially impresses a mob of undisciplined men, if the troops are in full uniform, provided that uniform is a serviceable one, as it should be. Everything should be adjusted with the same precision as if the troops were going upon parade. White gloves should be worn, the drum corps should be present, and the proper officers should be mounted; this last is very important, as a commanding officer on foot has not that control of his command which he has when mounted, he cannot see his men, nor can they observe him or understand his orders. The cavalry should also be mounted and horses should be provided for the battery of artillery. In other words the commands should be equipped for the field. They will then be in proper condition to fight, if it is necessary.

The commands will be concentrated at some central point, which should be selected somewhat remote from the scene of disturbance. In moving from the respective armories to the place of "rendezvous" the several commands should avoid any unnecessary noise or excitement. If possible they should reach the point at which the brigade is ordered to assemble without coming into collision with any portion of the mob. If, however, the passage of any command is obstructed and meets with armed resistance the command so attacked should immediately halt and prepare to force its way to its destination. If a regiment of infantry, it should be formed in column of companies or divisions. A line of skirmishers should then be sent forward from the leading company for the purpose of driving the mob from its position. The skirmishers should approach as near as possible to the enemy's line or defenses, taking advantage of any cover that may be available, and should reply rapidly to his fire. If necessary the skirmish line can be reinforced by successive lines of skirmishers. The firing should continue until the enemy's fire is entirely silenced, when a charge may be made upon his position with the object of driving him from the streets.

Unless protected by barricades it is not probable that the mob will long withstand the fire from the skirmish line, and as soon as it is dispersed the regiment should proceed to its destination.

The cavalry and artillery should pursue somewhat similar tactics: that is to say, they should endeavor to reach the point of concentration quietly and without disturbance; but if the mob should block their way and dispute their passage by force, decisive measures should be resorted to. In other words, it is expected that the several commands of the brigade will be at the "rendezvous" at the appointed hour, and they will go there, peacefully if they can, forcibly if they must.

It is necessary to state that in all cases the General in command should detail a particular battalion of infantry to proceed to the armory of the battery of artillery and escort it to the place of formation of the brigade. This force of infantry will prevent the artillery, should it be suddenly attacked, from falling into the hands of the mob, by holding the mob in check until the pieces can be unlimbered and brought into action. As soon as this is done and fire is opened from three or four pieces with canister, it is probable the artillery will be able to protect itself. The infantry can then be moved to the rear and act as a reserve.

The several commands of the brigade having arrived at the place of formation as ordered by the General, should be formed into three columns,* as follows: the centre consisting of the battery of artillery and a regiment of infantry, and the right and left columns consisting of the remaining regiments of infantry; the cavalry being assigned to the weaker command.

The infantry of the centre column should be formed in "close column by divisions." This formation is known as "the order preparatory for battle;" it prepares the troops for rapid deployment, and enables them to be speedily deployed in line of battle.

The infantry of the right and left columns should be formed in column of companies or divisions at full distance. This formation will enable them to form line of battle by a simple wheel of the subdivisions to the right or left, as the case may be, if attacked in flank. The centre column is free from this danger, being protected by the columns on its flanks.

The centre column should be preceded by an advance-guard composed of a company of well-disciplined troops selected from the regiment of infantry assigned to that column. The artillery should follow at a distance of about three hundred yards in column of sections, the pieces leading, and each caisson with ammunition following immediately behind its piece. The regiment of infantry should bring up the rear. By placing the company of infantry of an advance-guard in front of the main column, it will prevent any danger from a surprise; and should the mob be encountered sooner than contemplated, the infantry of the advance-guard will be able to hold it in check for a few moments until the leading pieces of artillery can be unlimbered and loaded.

In moving towards the district occupied by the mob, the three columns should proceed simultaneously by parallel streets, within easy supporting distance of each other; the heads of column should be kept as nearly as possible abreast. They will thus arrive at the scene of disturbance together, and striking the mob at different points, produce a more decided effect. Communication between the three columns should be constantly main-

*The advisability of forming the brigade into three columns of attack is, of course, somewhat dependent upon circumstances. In the case of a brigade organized as the one in question is supposed to be, and in a city which has a system of parallel streets leading towards the district occupied by the mob, this formation would be considered preferable. The brigade may not be of sufficient strength to admit of its being divided, in which case one or two columns should be formed.

tained, and should one of the columns be resisted in its march, the others should halt and reinforce it if necessary. Troops from the column not attacked would thus take the mob in flank and demoralize it. At the head of each column should be a number of workmen equipped with picks, axes, crowbars, and similar tools to enable them speedily to remove any obstructions that may have been placed in the road to impede the march of the troops.

The march of the three columns from the place of formation to the place occupied by the mob is known in war as a "manœuvre-march," and, "it is so called for the reason that it has not for its object a simple gain of ground, as is the case with an ordinary march, but to reach a suitable position on the field when a battle may follow. It is executed in the immediate neighborhood of the enemy, and really under his observation. It should therefore be characterized by perfect order and great celerity." *

Upon arriving near the scene of action a strong line of skirmishers† should be deployed a few hundred yards in front of each column, and a portion of the infantry of the two flank columns should be deployed in line of battle if the ground admits of such deployment. The skirmishers should move forward and endeavor to clear the ground in front of the lines. If the mob yields, the line of battle and the main body of the troops can follow. If the mob holds the ground and resists by force of arms, the skirmishers should fire upon the mob, and availing themselves of any shelter that may present itself, such as trees, telegraph-poles, doorsteps, etc., endeavor to silence the enemy's fire. If considered desirable, the skirmishers and advance-guard in front of the centre column can be withdrawn, and fire may be opened upon the mob with the artillery. The skirmish line can be reinforced if necessary by successive lines of skirmishers sent forward from the line of battle.

In active street fighting the mounted officers should be careful not to expose themselves unnecessarily to the enemy's fire. The various movements of the skirmish line, "the advance," "the retreat," etc., should be indicated by the trumpet. The trumpeter should remain constantly by the side of the officer commanding the skirmish line and should sound the various calls under his immediate direction.

If the mob is not behind barricades the artillery should use canister (canister being less destructive to property than grape, solid shot, or shell, and probably more effective for this purpose at close range). If the enemy is protected by defenses, it may be necessary to use shell and solid shot to dislodge him,

The firing of the skirmish line and the artillery, if used, should be continued until the enemy's fire is silenced, when a charge should be made by a portion of the infantry from the three columns, and the mob should be driven by the troops until it is entirely dispersed.

* Dufour.

† The best method of deploying skirmishers in a street is to form the company, or battalion in line, and then deploy by the numbers as explained in Par 358 Upton's Tactics.

If it should be necessary, a portion of the reserves from the rear of each column can be brought into action and the line of battle be extended.

The cavalry in charging should follow the remnants of the mob for a considerable distance, with the view of preventing it from again concentrating.

Upon the dispersion of the mob the troops should be so disposed as to hold the ground. The dispositions that should be made would, of course, depend on circumstances. If necessary, barricades should be thrown up across the principal streets. The commanding ground in the vicinity should be occupied, but under no circumstances should the troops be stationed in a building where they can be surrounded, or in such a position as would place them in a state of siege by the mob.

Case II. When the troops are required to go to a distant place, a remote city, controlled by a mob, the movements would be somewhat similar upon arriving on the ground. The following points should, however, be carefully considered :

The troops would, in all probability, be transported by rail. They should be thoroughly armed and equipped as in the previous case. The men should have their overcoats and blankets, and be supplied with rations and ammunition. Transportation should be furnished for the horses of the cavalry, artillery, and mounted officers, and in general it may be said that the command should be prepared for a campaign, and be able to rely upon its own resources. This would make the men independent, comfortable, and capable of enduring privation. The experience of all wars demonstrates this fact, that the efficiency of troops is very greatly increased by their being properly clothed and fed.

In moving troops by rail through a country likely to be hostile, great care and extraordinary precautions should be taken. The possibility of accident to the trains containing the main body of the troops and the horses and baggage should be carefully guarded against.

A special train consisting of a locomotive and one or two cars should be sent in advance. A company of infantry under the command of an experienced officer, and a strong gang of workmen, provided with tools, should be sent with this train. The bridges should be carefully examined, and when one is crossed the advanced guard should halt and wait until the trains containing the main body of the troops come up. This plan of action will prevent the possibility of the bridge being burnt or destroyed by enemies lying in ambush, and who may allow the advance-guard to pass by in order to slip in between it and the main columns.

The several trains containing the main body of the troops and the horses and baggage, etc., should keep as close to each other as safety from accident will permit. In passing through towns where danger is apprehended, a strong advance-guard should be sent in front of the trains. It might also be desirable to have a line of troops march on either side of the cars, and to make dispositions to force a passage or repel an attack. The trains should close up to each other as they pass through the towns on the route, and the

men should not be permitted to have any communication with the inhabitants. It is hardly necessary to state that there should be a strong guard with the horses and baggage. A rear-guard is also required.

In passing through tunnels and defiles the utmost precaution is necessary. A body of troops, if taken unawares, in such a position, is in great danger of being destroyed. Before passing through a cut or defile, the General should assure himself that the surrounding heights are not occupied; if they are, the enemy must be driven from them before the trains are permitted to enter the pass.

A tunnel should not be entered until it is found to be entirely clear, and after the passage of the advance-guard, one train only should pass through at a time.

If, in passing through the country, it should be found that the entire population is alarmed and opposed to the passage of the troops, one brigade should not attempt to penetrate any farther, lest a general uprising of the population might occur, and the "line of communication" of the troops from their "base of supplies" being cut, the entire command might be surrounded and captured.

Such precautions as these every capable General will observe. Their neglect has at times caused disaster and ruin.

Under no circumstances should the trains be run directly into the city which is under control of the mob; such action would be in the highest degree imprudent, as the mob would, in all probability, be waiting for the troops at the depots, and by attacking them while in the cars, and unprepared for an assault, great confusion and loss would result, if indeed the entire command should be fortunate enough to escape rout.

Upon nearing the city, the trains should close upon each other and proceed with the utmost caution. Upon arriving within a short march of the city, near the suburbs, and if possible where convenient roads lead into the town, the trains should be halted, the troops including the artillery and cavalry, should be disembarked from the cars, and the several commands be formed.

If three parallel roads or streets lead into the city, a formation similar to that pursued in Case I. can be followed with advantage. That is to say, the Brigade can be formed in three columns and enter the city by three parallel streets, the columns being within easy supporting distance of each other. If this plan is not practicable (and the General can always decide this point, as he will have with him a plan of the city, showing the location of the several streets, etc.), he will be obliged to move in one or two columns. In either case his command must be preceded by an advance-guard, and strong gangs of workmen, capable of leveling any obstructions that may be met with. If possible "flankers," consisting of small bodies of men, should be thrown out upon both flanks, their commanding officer being instructed to notify the General as soon as the position of the mob in the city is found. He will thus be enabled to make his dispositions intelligently, and prepare for the attack.

In entering into the thickly built up portion of the city, it may be found that the houses on either side of the streets through which the troops must pass are occupied by the mob, who begin firing on the troops. If such a state of affairs should be found, the General must immediately halt his command, and detail a certain portion of it to clear the houses on either side of his way. Infantry only is serviceable for this purpose, and if the mob is determined in its resistance, severe fighting will have to be done. If the houses are detached and standing alone, they should be captured by surrounding them; if contiguous, and vigorously defended, a passage may be made from one to the other by breaking through the separating walls, meeting the enemy hand to hand, and compelling his submission.

In no case should the General move his command forward while he is exposed to a flank fire from the houses on either side of the street. In this case the same rule is applicable as is prescribed for the passage of defiles, viz.: first, clear the enemy from the surrounding heights before entering the pass. A violation of this rule may lead to serious results.

The houses on either side of the streets being cleared, the General can make the same dispositions as were applicable in Case I. If the mob should resist his progress in front, the skirmishers that were deployed in front of the line of battle should immediately open fire upon the enemy's position, and protecting themselves by cover as much as possible, endeavor to silence his fire. If this is successful, a charge may be made upon him in force. A strong reserve should also be kept in the rear, which can be moved to any point that may be threatened.

After the mob has been dispersed the troops should boldly take possession of a commanding position in the town and await further developments. Under no circumstances should the troops be shut up in a building where they can be besieged and their "base of supplies" be cut off. Experience has shown the folly of such action. Troops without water and food are quickly overcome, and they should not be placed in a position where such a misfortune can occur.

If it is possible that the mob may reassemble in great numbers and return to attack the troops in their position, with the intention of driving them from the place, the position should be at once fortified by throwing up earthworks and barricades. In the construction of these defenses the workmen before referred to will be found of great service. Barricades can be constructed of anything that may be at hand. Paving-stones, wagons, carts, furniture, bedding, etc., can be used. The artillery should be placed where it will sweep the ground in front of the defenses. The troops should then calmly await the approach of the mob, and upon its arrival within about one hundred yards, simultaneously pour upon it a fire that will destroy it and prevent the possibility of another attack.

This fact should be remembered, that as a general rule in these cases a display of weakness or hesitation on the part of the troops or their commanding officers will proportionately augment the courage and numbers of

the mob and incite it to acts of violence. Bold and resolute action, when action is necessary, will in the end save much bloodshed and prevent great destruction of property.

It should be observed that in the consideration of this subject, one brigade of troops only has been considered. Should it be found necessary to employ more than one brigade, a division may be used advantageously. The general movements of the troops, and the plan of action to be followed, will be substantially the same whether a brigade or a division be employed, although in the latter case the movements will be on a more extended scale. A strong display of a well-disciplined and skillfully-handled force will in most instances be sufficient in itself to suppress the mob.

Philadelphia, Dec., 1878.



